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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the initial stages and activities associated with establishing professional development school (PDS) partnerships. Efforts to formulate working groups to develop PDSs began in 1987, and this discussion shares reflections on three years' work. PDSs generally begin when members of the college of education and local school faculties agree to work together to create a PDS. In the situation described in this paper, the first stage involved gaining entry to the schools and staging orientation activities that were designed to develop shared understanding among school and university faculty on key issues, ideas about teaching and learning, professional education, and restructuring. The approach to gaining entry to the buildings and the levels of cooperation and resistance encountered varied from school to school. The orientation activities included get-acquainted sessions that focused on identifying and sharing ideas about teaching, learning, professional education, and changes needed. Another focal point was identifying an initial plan for change and inquiry. Although there were aspects of the process of establishing a PDS that were enthusiastically embraced by some school faculty, the process was complicated by resistance on the part of building-level and district administrators and by hostility from some university faculty toward their colleagues working with the PDS partnerships. (IAH)

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Initiating Conversation at a Professional Development School

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Professional Development Schools are created through the process of teacher educators/researchers, administrators, and teachers working together to: provide teaching and learning for understanding for K-8 students; restructure schools; and restructure professional education programs. The task begins as members of a college of education and a particular school site agree to work together to create a professional development school. In some Districts a community organization is also a part of the original partnership.

The sites where partnerships were initially being formed (1987) struggled with: (1) learning each others institutional norms; (2) understanding each others' current practices; (3) focusing one's work and finding the right amount of involvement for the individual; (4) focusing on particular K-12 teaching/learning problems that would lead to teaching for understanding; and (5) formulating a vision of the new PDS institution. Schools that have been started since 1987 have the benefit of the what has been learned from the initial site's struggles and from the vision provided by the Holmes Group in the form of Tomorrow's Schools (1990) .

Getting the conversation going in a particular PDS site generally can be traced through three phases. There is some evidence (documentation notes, Averill 1987-91) that the phases reoccur over time as the site moves further and further from the original public

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school institution and closer to a new institution with new norms, roles, rules and procedures.

In the initial PDS sites the teachers, administrators and teacher educators each had specific ideas about the relationships they had with each other. These ideas included the quality of those relationships, the appropriateness of those relationships to the new institution. We also found that each role group had, at least a vague notion of what relationship they wanted with the other adults in the future. The initial ideas began to be challenged from the very beginning.

To flush out the ideas that individuals held three buildings systematically worked to build the initial relationships through the use of orientation activities. Orientation involved gaining entry and developing shared understandings of the school and university members ideas about teaching/learning, professional education, and restructuring. These activities involved: group discussion meetings; visitations to classrooms at both the university and school site; small group subject matter planning sessions; and a two week summer institute.

To begin the process the university (since they were the ones initiating the work) worked to gain entry into a specific school. This process was different in different buildings. For example in one school the central administration through the principal asked teachers to volunteer. One team of four teachers did volunteer. The district and building university coordinators recruited three special education teachers. After the first year of the work, it became clear that the principal had acted directly to stop other teachers from becoming

involved. In a second building, after the building had been okayed by the superintendent and union president, the district and building university coordinator met with the building administrators. Once the building administrators heard about the work, they suggested that the university people meet with members of each department in the school. Schedules were set up and 8 different meetings were held to explain the PDS idea and answer individual's questions. After the series of meetings teachers were asked to indicate, in writing, whether or not they wanted to participate and if so when they would like to enter the process. Those teachers indicating that they wanted to start immediately were involved in the initial activities. In a third building the university and building administrator and teachers approached the school district asking that they be a part of a proposal seeking grant funds to support the initiation of a PDS. The district rejected the idea the first time. When a second opportunity arose the principal worked closer with the university to help bring about a positive response to the request from the district, for the school to participate in the educational reform proposal.

Once entry to the building was gained a series of meetings among teachers, administrators and university personal were held. The purposes of these sessions were to: (1) get acquainted by identifying ideas participants held about teaching/learning, professional education, and restructuring and (2) identify collaboratively areas of work that would be appropriate for the specific needs of the learners in the specific school context.

The series of meetings basically involved asking participants to reflect, make notes, and discuss with colleagues their ideas. An example of one series of these meetings can be seen in Figure 1. Worksheets were designed to guide the reflection and discussion. See attachments. Once the deliberations were started a second type of activity was initiated. This activity involved teachers and administrators in visiting other PDS sites and teacher education courses taught by the university members. University faculty visited classrooms for extend period of time.

Figure 1
Outline of PDS Getting Acquainted Sessions

1. Getting members acquainted with each others ideas about teaching/learning/schools/schooling.
2. Identifying beliefs about current state of teaching/learning.
3. Identifying beliefs about current state of professional education.
4. Identifying beliefs about what needed to be changed.
5. Identifying an initial plan for change and inquiry.

Getting members acquainted with each others ideas about teaching/learning/schools/schooling. Members of a given PDS participated in initial orientation activities that supported members communicating about their reasons for being in the field of education, why they are still in this field, what they get their kicks from in their professional work, something that they identify as being a contribution to others, something that is difficult for them to do, and

why they wanted to participate in the development of a PDS. We found that members were in education for reasons ranging from "failed med school exam to I love children." They indicated they were still in teaching because they were "stuck and couldn't find other employment, didn't know of anything else they could do, were challenged by today's learners, thought that the PDS reform was the most exciting thing that had happened in their entire career.

Two main outcomes came from these conversations. First school faculty communicated that they felt "listened to and valued for the first time in years." Both university and school faculty indicated that they learned new things about their colleagues in education. They felt that stereotypes (e.g., university folks were not concerned about learners or teachers were not concerned about improving instruction) were challenged.

Identifying beliefs about current state of teaching/learning. Beliefs about current state of teaching and learning were identified through conversations about the current strengths and weaknesses of the school. Members were also asked to think about their "dreams" of what teaching and learning would be like. The deliberations lead to understandings that norms of the public school and university were, as expected, very different. How these differed and the effect of the given norms were initially understood at a descriptive level. That is, it was not possible initially to answer the question "What constructive or destructive effect would this norm have on a PDS community?". Once work began on thinking about plans for teaching for understanding and related inquiry the effects of norms began to emerge.

For example in one school the principal was clear that her decisions about what specific faculty would, could or should do was in the best interest of the school community. The addition of the university personnel brought some tension to this norm for decision making until the university building coordinator took on the position of the school site. That position was that everyone looked out for everyone else. When asked for an example of this one teacher said that the principal told him what he could be involved in. "She knows what we can handle." A similar norm exists in other buildings under the title of "family." In these buildings the teachers report that "we are just like a family, we take care of each other." Initially the concept of family sounds like support. Unpacking the idea further through discussion and observations of life in the school led to the recognition that the "family" concept bring with it a set of "keeping the status quo" behaviors. For example, faculty that began early in the PDS development to take on different roles, we told by others that they "should not be doing the new thing because they no longer acted like they did before the PDS work started."

In another building in response to a question about how a plan could be implemented, a teacher told the female teacher educator that the only way was to get "permission" and to do that she should "walk right down the hall and put your arms around that man standing against the wall and kiss him on the forehead." In a third school the teachers, teacher educators and the administrator worked out a plan for involving more teacher candidates in the building. The plan was approved by all but the principal at the last day of planning. The

teachers then looked at the principal and said "Then does this mean that we can't do this?" These teachers assumed that the principal had veto power.

Identifying beliefs about current state of professional education. Professional education beliefs varied, depending on the teachers and administrators experiences with teacher preparation programs. The education of administrators and other educators (e.g., counselors) were not part of the initial conversations. The conversations focused primarily on the need for teacher candidates to have more time in schools or for school faculty to have more input into teacher preparation programs.

Identifying beliefs about what needed to be changed. Restructuring was an area in which initial discussion showed that people felt major changes needed to be made. But, they did not know what specifically could be done. The constraints of working ten to twenty years in the school district seem to act as a constraint to thinking about the possibilities of real reform. Teachers in one building worried that anything they created would be vetoed by the principal and that they did not have permission to talk to administrators above the level of the building principal. Teachers in a second building stated that what they needed was "materials". Instruction was not a primary concern and they felt that being a part of the PDS would get them supplies to carry out their current ideas. Yet others thought of the restructuring as almost impossible. The changes they wanted to study in curriculum, they thought would certainly not be supported let alone approved.

Identifying an initial plan for change and inquiry. Work on identifying a plan of work led to the finding that in general, all participants wanted students to learn more. The way to achieve this was where the members differed. For example, some teachers believed that a focus on self concept lessons was essential before any academic achievement would occur. Others thought that self esteem was needed, but that it would be achieved in part at least though better instruction and better academic learning outcomes. For many the PDS vision was "totally idealistic" and not realistic. For others it was idealistic but a realistic goal.

In some the initial schools, it was at this phase that "bargains were struck" with administrators as a means to move on with the work. For example, one district told the school that it could not change curriculum. Since the district curriculum was not being taught in the school at the time that the PDS gained entry, this mandate appeared to identify a place where administrators were not aware of what was actually happening in the school. Over the years the teachers had made adjustments, the district had added areas (e.g., the Michigan Health Plan, sex education) and nothing had been officially deleted from the program.

An Insiders View

The questions about what a PDS is and why one would voluntarily made a career decision to work in the creation of such sites are ones that frequently were asked and answered during the initiation of the PDS sites. The diagram below represents the feeling that the district

coordinator had in working with two of the buildings to get something started. Having found a set of people who wanted to work together to create a PDS was a very fragile first step. Once this group was identified the process of creating an effective group began.

The initial impression that of being the schools was one of being "over valued." This came from the reaction of teachers to the teacher educators asking them questions, listening to their ideas, and challenging thinking. The thankfulness that they were valued by someone, that someone would ask and listen to them was overwhelming. It felt like the teachers needs were possibly beyond what university participants could provide over time.

A second impression that was created was one of one's inner core of being "sucked out, sponged up or taken away." There were several sources of this feeling. First was the need of the school faculty for adult colleagues. Second was those problems created by building level administrators. Third was the reaction of some central administrators who saw teachers and university folks asking questions about teaching and learning as a threat to their turf. Fourth was the experience of trying to work out a partnership across structures at the university which resulted in personal and professional attacks on university PDS personnel.

These two impression led to university leaders having to place themselves inside the community to help bring about the changes and at the same time position themselves to protect the new environment from the attacks from both the inside and outside.

Starting the initial PDS was clearly the most difficult work that this author has ever done. Starting PDS is not as difficult as it was in the beginning since the initial schools were started as the PDS has become politically positive, teachers can talk to their colleagues about their changes, administrators can talk to their colleagues about their experiences and university faculty can identify the complexities of the school contexts for its contributions to their promotions and research as well as the distractions.

Why do this work? The first 3 years of this work results in evidence that teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and community members can change. That working together some different things begin to happen for students. Why do this work? Because this is a reform that is working.